


# **#Africa4Her Generates Support for Women and Girls: Olakunle Adewale, 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow, Nigeria**

We asked some of the many YALI Network members who in March made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge to invest in women and girls in their community how they have fulfilled that pledge. Here is **Olakunle Adewale's** story.

I have started work on my pledge by making an art piece that calls for action by all professionals to invest in girls and women in Africa.

I pledged to invest in young women and girls in Africa using a creative approach that can help improve the outcome of their lives. This will be achieved through art workshops which will be facilitated by volunteer professionals in the field of visual arts in Nigeria.

The products of these workshops will be exhibited on various media platforms — social media, digital media, and electronic and print media. Finally, the works will be exhibited for sale while a percentage of the income generated will be given to the girls and women who produced the works. The participants will also have the privilege of being mentored by professionals during and after the program.

The painting is a picture of a young African woman  enclosed in a light bulb. The bulb is at the center of an opened book which has the colors of the flag of the United States of America and colors of flags of other African countries. The painting titled Africa4Her shows empowerment for the African woman through investment in education.

I believe professionals should lend support to the female folks who sometimes do not have the opportunities of being empowered like their male counterparts. I feel obligated to help in educating and empowering the girl child as an artist. It is important to create a just society where there is equality in opportunity for men and women, boys and girls.

I have been a volunteer for more than a decade working with nonprofits through community and civic engagement. In the past five years, I have mobilized more than 500 young professionals who volunteered at nonprofit organizations. I have learned about the power of collaboration and teamwork if one is going to make an indelible mark! It has also birthed in me the joy and fulfillment of contributing my quota in making the world a better place.

**I volunteered to fill the space and vacuum in my community by engaging my leadership skills in ensuring a better world for everyone that lives within my reach. Everyone is endowed with an ability to innovate, associate, create and cultivate something that would be of great benefit to the world. Most importantly, being a visual artist and educator, I believe art can be used for community development and civic engagement by educating and empowering people around me. I feel i'm a indebted to my society, thus i have an obligation to perform and take responsibility for the development of my environment.**

**For me, service more of a life style than the gift of service to humanity. It is better to serve than to be served. ... I grow when I sow seeds of greatness into the lives people around me by providing opportunities and platforms where they can increase in knowledge and skill acquisition.**

**It is best to be a servant leader because it attracts more reward in this world and the world to come. The experience has taught me empathy, compassion, respect for humanity and increased passion in my pursuit of making the world a better place. Leadership is space — not just a place to occupy but a place to multiply people.**

Nigerian artist Olakunle Adewale displays the painting he named Africa4Her.



This experience will make me a better leader because everyone matters, irrespective of their gender, class, tribe or race. So there is equal opportunity for development and empowerment.

More so, the need for partnership and collaboration with people in the community, community leaders and other organizations are good ways to achieve greatness and collective success. It will give me more opportunity to learn from partner organization in my campaign and advocate in fulfillment of my pledge to invest in women and girls in Africa.

More than 1,000 YALI Network members made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge. They represent 47 countries, and 54 percent of them are men. If you made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge and would like to share your story, please email us at [YALINetwork@state.gov](mailto:YALINetwork@state.gov) and use the subject line “#Africa4Her.”

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## **Early Challenges Inspire Later Success**

Entrepreneur and community volunteer Christopher Asego credits the challenges of growing up in a slum as inspiration for wanting to help end poverty.

“The world has lots of problems. People who live them every day have the best solutions,” he says on his Facebook page.

In June, Asego, a YALI Network member, spent two weeks in Chicago and Washington learning how innovators and entrepreneurs in the United States tackle their common business challenges. His visit was sponsored by the Global Innovation through Science and Technology (GIST) initiative and included young entrepreneurs from Kenya, Uganda, Jordan, Tunisia, Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Growing up, Asego attended an overcrowded school in Nairobi’s Kibera area. Too shy to question his teacher when he didn’t understand something, he lagged behind his classmates. “Not every child can learn in the same way at the same speed,” he said.

But Asego had an advantage. His mother was a teacher and stuck by her son until he graduated from secondary school. “Not every child is as lucky as I was. ... A lot of children who experience early failure in school end up dropping out,” he said.

Now 27, Asego went on to graduate from Kenya’s Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. He partnered with two peers to create Eneza Education, a firm that serves as a mobile phone-based tutor and teacher’s assistant. Eneza, which means “to reach” or “to spread,” aims “to make 50 million kids across Africa smarter,” according to the company’s website.

Asego said he will take what he learned in the United States back to his community and company. He especially wants to share his knowledge with “up-and-coming entrepreneurs” who face the challenges of getting a business off the ground. “Back home, when you approach an investor, they want to see traction — traction you don’t have because you are just a startup,” he said.

Aside from his business, Asego volunteers to help eradicate jiggers from his community. Jiggers are tropical parasitic insects that “affect the interiors of the toes of children when they walk barefoot,” Asego said. With other volunteers involved in the nationwide effort to eradicate jiggers from Kenya by 2015, Asego goes house-to-house to wash children’s feet with a disinfectant.

“I have developed some kind of attachment to the slum because I grew up there,” he said.

**Photo credit: Christopher Asego**

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